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Global Cloud Communications

The Small Business Guide to Cloud Communications

Five key considerations for choosing the ideal cloud communications provider.

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As a small business owner, you know how important it is to communicate well with your customers, partners and suppliers. Communication and collaboration are the foundation of building strong relations to increase productivity and business efficiency. With that in mind, doesn't it make sense for your company to take the next step in communications?

That next step is to choose a communications solution that enables your business to:

- Use a unified phone system to work from anywhere, anytime;
- Enjoy the ability to always be connected via mobile apps, companywide extension dialing, call forwarding and voicemail-to-email;
- Participate in real-time conferencing and collaboration that happens naturally as part of a continuous communications experience;
- Avoid IT complexities like setting up new employees' phone numbers or figuring out problems with call quality and reliability;
- Save money by eliminating PBX hardware for each of your business locations and not have to pay for onsite maintenance to support that hardware.

Cloud communications can help you gain the latest collaborative features and realize ease-of-use and cost-savings benefits—and many more advantages—so that your team can focus on growing your business.

In comparison to an on-premises phone system, the right cloud communications solution—also known as VoIP or a hosted PBX—provides the flexibility and power that allows your employees to work smarter and be more productive. That's a must for today's modern workforce, which is more mobile and often works flexible hours from home or while on the road. At the same time, moving to cloud communications relieves small business owners and IT staff of the headaches of managing IT equipment, including upgrading systems and dealing with security issues.

Not all cloud communication providers are equal, though. Many cobble together their products from other vendors and don't guarantee service quality for your phone calls.

Here are five key considerations to keep in mind to make sure your company connects with a provider that will bring the future you want for your business to life:

1. COLLABORATE MORE FREELY.

Manage critical collaborations with greater fluidity. You should be able to stay connected while you're out of the office—allowing you to receive and make business calls on your mobile devices while still appearing as if you're calling from the office. You also should be able to configure your desk phones and mobile phones to ring simultaneously when a call comes in. With email notifications of voicemails, your team can quickly respond to missed calls. Additionally, ring groups can effectively distribute calls throughout departments or work groups so incoming calls can quickly be picked up by the first available team member. No more missed calls.

Be more productive across your on-the-go organization. Business texting, chats, instant messaging, availability status updates and virtual online conferencing with video can empower workers to collaborate and work more efficiently. These capabilities should be integrated into your cloud communications solution. Virtual meetings, which allow people to connect with each other from almost anywhere using video conferencing, help employees working in different offices or from their homes feel as if they're in the same room. Put it all together and there's no limit to your team's ability to be united in working towards critical end goals, wherever individuals are located.

Don't overlook reliability. Many cloud communication providers do not own their data centers and are not able to provide uptime and call quality guarantees. Geographically redundant data

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centers, encryption across your communications, and security compliance are also very important. With these capabilities in place, you can be sure that a snow storm or natural disaster won't leave your business with a busy signal.

8x8 Virtual Office addresses all of these fronts. It offers the latest features to ensure that you can communicate and collaborate in multiple ways, including providing premium voice quality. And you'll get it all without risking security or service availability. 8x8 delivers its solution via its own comprehensive platform using redundant data centers in multiple supported global regions.

2. EXPERIENCE EASY DEPLOYMENT AND MANAGEMENT.

Choose a cloud communications service that's easy to use and administer. When you have limited IT staff or none at all, it's important to choose a cloud communications system that's easy to deploy, use and manage. Your provider should manage all the hardware, software and upgrades behind the scenes so you don't have to. Also think about issues such as whether you'll have easy access to a technical installation support specialist, to deal with challenges such as porting phone numbers from your legacy PBX or setting up call routing for an auto-attendant feature.

Centralized management is essential. Make it as easy as possible for your office manager or other administrator to directly support changes without having to rely on technical staff. Of equal consideration is that no one should be burdened with separate systems to manage different offices or devices. It's also valuable if potential providers offer a customer knowledge base to walk you through your help questions and requests, whether you're in search of troubleshooting advice or how-to guidance.

8x8 Virtual Office makes it simple to get your phone system up and keep it running smoothly. 8x8 manages cloud communications for you in its own data center, takes all the responsibility for fixes and upgrades and puts a priority on providing customers with whatever technical support you need.

3. GET EVERYTHING YOU NEED COMPLETELY INTEGRATED FROM ONE PROVIDER.

Be sure you know what you're buying. Many companies sell cloud communications systems that are actually made up of other companies' products. Perhaps they're responsible for one part of the solution, such as the cloud PBX, but they bundle other capabilities—say, online meetings—from different vendors.

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Five Reasons to Choose Cloud Communications

1.

Collaborate more freely.

2.

Experience easy deployment and management.

3.

Get everything you need completely integrated from one provider.

4.

Access big savings.

5.

Pick a cloud communications system that will support your customers' evolving work styles and your business' changing needs.

As a result, their offerings are not always as integrated and complete as you would expect. As you evaluate the best solution for your business communications needs, be sure to find out who actually owns the technology in the system you're buying.

Save your time, protect your business. When solutions are cobbled together from multiple vendors' components, problems are just waiting to happen. The lines may not be very clear about who is responsible for fixing a particular technology issue when something goes awry. Your business could be left holding the bag. Think about what could happen if a critical bug is discovered in software your cloud communications provider doesn't own, or if you need advanced support. Will you be bounced around from one provider to another?

8x8's pure-cloud offering combines voice, conferencing, messaging and video with integrated workflows and big data analytics on a single platform. Because 8x8 uses its own technology, it can address user issues and fix bugs immediately.

4. ACCESS BIG SAVINGS.

The right cloud communications provider can provide your business with significant savings on its communications spending. You'll realize savings from not having to support and upgrade an onsite hardware PBX infrastructure, of course. But there's more to it, including the savings you'll see when you you take advantage of features such as extension dialing to other office sites to eliminate long distance costs; mobile apps in combination with Wi-Fi to avoid international roaming charges; or built-in call recording that enables your company to do away with other equipment.

Find the plan that's right for you. It's important to avoid providers that force you into buying expensive plans for everyone in your company just because a few of your employees need a couple of advanced features. Equally compelling is to find a provider whose system helps you control ongoing costs with good reporting and tracking features and capabilities like predictable billing.

8x8 Virtual Office lets you choose the options you need, providing plans that give you the flexibility of the cloud that works for every user in your business at whatever level they need to operate.

5. PICK A CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS SOLUTION THAT WILL SUPPORT YOUR CUSTOMERS' EVOLVING WORK STYLES AND YOUR BUSINESS' CHANGING NEEDS.

A good service lets you accommodate customer interactions in new ways. Consumers are talking less and texting more, for example. So, you'll want a solution that lets you send and receive SMS text messages on computers and smart devices. Providing this means of customer interaction is a plus to help them get in touch with you in the most convenient way. And it makes it easy for you to remind them of appointments, update them on changes to business hours or contacts, and even send thank-you messages after the sale. It's great if you can preserve those messages in your contact history, too, in case you need to reference them later.

Plan now for adding a contact center later. A growing business may find that it needs to add call center operations. Next-generation contact center solutions should include features such as skills-based routing to connect customers to the right agent groups; integration with critical CRM systems, such as Salesforce to drive agent efficiency and a holistic customer experience; and support for customers to use the engagement channel they prefer, such as phone, voicemail, email and chat. Your customers will be happier and you'll be set up for repeat business if you can provide them world-class contact center capabilities, with workforce optimization, and advanced business phone and collaboration services.

Look for an innovative provider. There are plenty of capabilities that your employees will come to expect from their communications solutions, such as HD video and audio capabilities for online meetings. Thinking ahead to how the business will evolve, and how it will do so while providing optimal collaboration for your users, must be a part of your company's cloud communications planning.

8x8 Virtual Office is built with flexibility in mind, making it possible for you to add on new functionality with the greatest of ease and sophistication. Add 8x8 Virtual Contact Center to the picture as your business grows, and your business will be truly prepared to transform your customer service.

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To learn more about 8x8 cloud communications solutions for small and midsize businesses, call **1-855-465-7904 or go to 8x8.com.**

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ABOUT 8X8 INC.

8x8, Inc. (NASDAQ:EGHT) is the trusted provider of secure and reliable enterprise cloud communications solutions to more than 47,000 businesses operating in more than 100 countries across six continents. 8x8's out-of-the-box cloud solutions replace traditional on-premises PBX hardware and software-based systems with a flexible and scalable Software as a Service (SaaS) alternative, encompassing cloud business phone service, contact center solutions, and conferencing. For additional information, visit www.8x8.com, www.8x8.com/UK or connect with 8x8 on LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+ and Facebook.